

# Section iv.) Upper Swatara Watershed Area Transition Report

## ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA

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### Deliverables and Outcomes

#### Capacity Building & Planning

- Formed multi-municipal **working groups** (Watershed Management, Business Recovery, Legislative Affairs and Students/Teens) and a steering committee to help with their long-term community recovery efforts
- **Fostered relationships** with multiple federal, state, county and local organizations and agencies engaged with community recovery
- Engaged The Center for Rural Pennsylvania to assist with the **community's visioning process**
- Organized six **educational outreach** presentations to the Watershed Management Working Group
- Identified and scoped a project to improve the effectiveness of **student community service** time
- Produced a **Strategic Plan** to help the community envision its future

#### Business & Housing

- Encouraged the adoption of a **StormReady** program at the local level for enhanced disaster warning and response
- Encouraged the adoption of the **Community Rating System (CRS)** that encompasses comprehensive floodplain management at the local level that can significantly lower flood insurance premiums

#### Infrastructure Systems; Flood Protection

- Provided flood proofing technical assistance to two significant employers

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- Identified, scoped and prioritized 20 project sites that contributed to area flooding and sedimentation
- Identified and scoped a riverfront bike park for teens that shall provide needed after school activity and an adaptive reuse opportunity of a floodplain greyfield

## **Background**

On September 8, 2011, Tropical Storm Lee dumped more than 15 inches of rainfall onto the Upper Swatara Creek watershed. This intensive inundation swelled Swatara Creek to 24 feet, the highest level ever recorded, severely flooding Tremont and Pine Grove, downstream. The Pine Grove Business Association's damage survey indicated 90% of its 50 businesses were impacted with either physical damage or business disruption. Two of the borough's major employers were permanently closed, a consequence that precipitated a 37% drop in employment (from 765 to 462).

The Upper Swatara watershed encompasses eight municipalities: Pine Grove Borough, Pine Grove Township, Tremont Borough, Tremont Township, Frailey Township, Wayne Township, Reilly Township and Washington Township. This area nearly coincides with the boundaries of the Pine Grove Area School District, an institution that community leaders indicate defines the identity of the area.

Through the strategic planning process, ESF #14 helped the communities come together and determine where to go over the next one to five years. This report represents the strategic planning that was completed over a four month period (December 2011–March 2012) after the federally declared disaster caused by Tropical Storm Lee. The process engaged local leaders, residents, and businesses of the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara community. Strategies developed during this process, and documented in this report, focused in two areas: community capacity building and watershed improvements. As they are implemented, these strategies will put the community on the path of recovery and revitalization.

## **Strategic Initiatives**

### **Approach**

The Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) process led to the establishment of a community-based, post-disaster vision, and identification of projects and funding strategies best suited to achieving that vision, while employing mechanisms to implement those projects. This is not a typical planning document, but rather a plan which focuses on recovery from a disaster that has overwhelmed several of the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara's resources. Timing is an important factor in this process because it helps focus rebuilding efforts in a united direction.

Even though the flooding of 2011 brought repeated damages and hardships to the area, it also brought opportunities. Following the widespread and repeated destruction, there is now an opportunity to address the area's watershed and politico-economic future in a way that wasn't possible before. The federal disaster declaration brought the opportunity to access many outside resources addressing not only the causes and impacts of flooding to the community, but how to recover, rebuild and revitalize the communities of the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara. This area

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is now in a favorable position of having commonwealth and federal assistance from outside experts and agencies focused on its challenges, needs and opportunities.

The area has created this community-based strategic recovery plan in order to make best use of these outside resources. During the assessment process, community stakeholders and committee leaders identified a number of ideas they believe would assist with their community's long-term recovery. These ideas were scoped, vetted and prioritized into a series of projects. The high priority projects are described in Part Two of this plan. These projects are the backbone of this strategic plan. Together with the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara's strong sense of community, mutual support, and perseverance, they define an effective road map to put the community on the path of recovery and revitalization.

### **Overarching Goals**

Strategic planning is action oriented. It establishes goals to be achieved and identifies tactics or methods for achieving these goals. Tactics were developed through the steering committee and working groups. The steering committee guided the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara community to develop the following initial goals:

1. Create a vision that can guide community recovery and development of the Pine Grove Area School District.
2. Incorporate youth from the area in all aspects of the process.
3. Identify methods to reduce illicit drugs and drug use in the community.
4. Establish a coordinated and cooperative process for addressing watershed issues.
5. Improve opportunities for small business and local business districts.
6. Increase recreational opportunities.
7. Establish relationships with organizations and agencies that can provide resources for implementation.

Researching the first strategic goal necessitated learning from other communities' successes. Located some thirty miles away, Tamaqua Borough has been implementing its recovery process for twenty years. Its initial efforts were guided by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. The steering committee invited Micah Gursky, president of Tamaqua Borough Council, as a guest speaker at a public meeting held at the Pine Grove Area High School. Mr. Gursky described the success that Tamaqua had achieved through creating a vision for the future and building a community-based plan.

The participants were so energized by this presentation they agreed to conduct their own community visioning process under the guidance of the center and LTCR staff. Later in the effort, the steering committee renamed itself Swatara Works Action Team or "S.W.A.T."

### **Community Recovery Goals**

Under the guidance of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and supported by the strategic recovery team the

Steering Committee members hosted a community visioning exercise on March 26, 2012. The top five issues identified during this meeting were:

1. Revitalization of community downtown areas;
2. Recruitment of manufacturing firms to the region;

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3. Increasing the number of students going on to college or trade school;
4. Encouraging the development of small businesses; and
5. Increase the number of higher paying jobs in the area.

Topic areas that are most important to the participating community members were:

- Economic development;
- Other community issues;
- Health /social service issues;
- Local governmental issues; and
- Educational issues.

On April 2, 2012, the S.W.A.T. Steering Committee decided to establish working groups to tackle these issues. Four working groups were established: Watershed Management, Business Recovery, Legislative Affairs and Students/Teens.

The Watershed Management Working Group, hosted by the Schuylkill Conservation District, identified areas that contributed significantly to flooding and sedimentation. The working group targeted 20 sites where improvements, general reforestation and floodplain restoration would address concerns. In a subsequent meeting, they prioritized these sites and rated seven sites as high priority, requiring immediate assistance.

The Business Recovery Working Group, hosted by the Schuylkill Economic Development Corporation, identified three projects. The first was to hire a recovery manager. The working group felt it would benefit the entire area to have a full time recovery manager to continue supporting and guiding the steering committee and working groups. The working group also recommended that municipalities enhance disaster early warning capabilities through becoming StormReady communities and embracing the adoption of the Community Rating System that encompasses comprehensive floodplain management at the local level.

The Legislative Affairs Working Group, consisting of Representative Tobash, Senator Argall and their respective senior staffs, worked to raise awareness among Schuylkill County officials on how to improve the health and safety of its citizens through floodplain ordinance updates and enforcement.

The Students/Teens Working Group from Pine Grove Area High School selected two projects designed to mitigate against its chief concern: the lack of meaningful after-school activities. The two projects are constructing a bike park and redesigning their high school community service program.

This report documents the process that the community followed, and the goals, tactics and actions undertaken to implement strategies. It also provides detailed write-ups of recovery projects. The community, represented by the Swatara Works Action Team (steering committee) seeks partners to join them as they recover from this disaster and move toward a prosperous future.

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### **Next Steps**

The LTCR planning process has established momentum. Not only did community members come together, but neighbors from other communities arrived with helping hands. As this phase of the planning process comes to a close, it will be important to build on this momentum in a manner that leads toward implementation of projects. It is important to remember that recovery from a disaster is a process, not an event. Not all of these projects will be implemented immediately or simultaneously, and some may take years to accomplish.

One of the most important elements for maintaining momentum is to continue to work as a team, within the S.W.A.T. Steering Committee, work groups and the local communities; supporting each other so that projects move forward.

To accomplish the projects in this plan, the S.W.A.T. Steering Committee will need to identify resources from within and outside the watershed boundaries. Partnerships need to be formed with nearby communities, county government, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, private businesses and business associations. Most of these partners can be found within a region that extends into Schuylkill County and even to Harrisburg.

Regionalism and the increased capacity gained from partnerships will enable the community to leverage resources for a wide variety of recovery actions. For the past decade there has been a steady and marked shift in federal, state, and foundation grant programs to fund regional and multi-jurisdictional projects rather than single-purpose, single-jurisdiction projects. Private investors, businesses, developers, and financial institutions are also increasingly requiring larger impact areas as criteria for funding projects. The Upper Swatara watershed area fits these definitions.

Many of these partners, particularly local and regional partners, have been introduced to the community through this process. It will be important to keep these partners informed of the local efforts, and seek to secure support from these organizations for projects in this plan. This will help to identify resources (technical, in-kind, and financial) for plan implementation.

The grants market is extremely competitive. Public and private granting agencies do not generally provide 100 percent funding, and may not fund all of the administrative/management costs associated with a project. A well-written, financially sound, sustainable proposal, with strong local support, will be highly competitive.

### **Hire a Recovery Manager**

The complex job of managing vision plan implementation can be facilitated by hiring a recovery manager to assist community leaders and the recovery committee. The recovery manager can take on the role of managing the committee activities, communication, and accountability to the organizational structure. As the central point of contact for recovery project management, the recovery manager shares project issues with internal stakeholders and strives to identify outside resources for project implementation.

### **Identify and Pursue Catalyst Projects**

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Not all projects featured in this Strategic Plan can be implemented immediately. There are many factors that affect the length of time it takes to develop, design and implement a project. Therefore, it is important to identify “catalyst” projects as a priority. Catalyst projects are high-profile initiatives that, as they are implemented, attract additional investment and development/redevelopment to occur in close proximity to the initial project. A catalyst project demonstrates the community commitment for recovery and will often cross sectors such as an economic development project stimulating a recreation project.

#### **Create a Master Project Timeline**

S.W.A.T. should continue to work with local leaders, the working groups (business, watershed management and legislative affairs), other stakeholders and area residents to establish priorities that fit within the community vision plan. Effectively coordinating the implementation of these projects requires the development of project timelines. Establishing project timelines will provide a clear picture of when projects are approaching milestone marks, pinpoint resource constraints, and where project coordination is required.

#### **Establish/Revise Recovery Leadership Roles and Responsibilities**

S.W.A.T. will need to establish clear roles and responsibilities during the planning process. As the recovery/visioning process transitions into implementation, roles and responsibilities may need to be redefined and the committee structure adjusted to accommodate project champions and other stakeholders. Community leaders and the steering committee should continue to identify individuals and organizations that can play lead, support, or advisory roles for projects. Creating an organizational matrix will provide a structure to help the recovery committee to maintain communication with project leaders.

#### **Establish/Revise Recovery Communications Strategy**

The recovery committee is continuing to hold regular meetings with stakeholders and leaders as the primary communication tool. Adopting a formal communication policy will help ensure that effective information sharing takes place. For example, these meetings should include an agenda that has each project lead or champion reporting on the status of their projects, milestones achieved, and barriers they are encountering. In addition, a communication strategy should provide information to residents of the community and media outlets as an ongoing activity. Other tools to help strengthen communication include regular newsletters, recovery websites, and social media sites.

#### **Secure a Grant Writer**

Given that most of the recommended projects require funding, having a person dedicated to researching grant opportunities and submission can accelerate project implementation. A university intern with grant writing training may be an option.

### **Recommendations**

In the process of developing this *Strategic Plan*, participants identified 18 important recommendations that would support the Pine Grove Area/Upper Swatara’s recovery plan. These recommendations are described in Table 1 below.

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| #  | Working Group | Champion  | Recommendation  |
|----|---------------|---|---|
| 1  | Watershed     | John Matz, Schuylkill County EMA  | Certify Pine Grove area towns as <b>StormReady Communities</b> .  |
| 2  | Watershed     | John Matz, Schuylkill County EMA  | Gather information from the Nurture Nature Center, in Easton, to help with <b>outreach and education</b> on flood prevention.   |
| 3  | Watershed     | Elizabeth Hinkel, Schuylkill Conservation District  | Contract with DCED to manage the NFIP Community Assistance Program which provides financial aid to conduct community assistance visits/community assistance contacts in Schuylkill County municipalities to <b>improve floodplain ordinance administration/implementation</b> . |
| 4  | Watershed     | Bobby Milligan, EMA, Pine Grove Township  | Extend <b>inundation mapping</b> with help from SRVC, FEMA and others up Swatara Creek and to include Pine Grove.   |
| 5  | Watershed     | Susan Smith, Schuylkill County Planning   | Apply to PA DEP for an <b>Environmental Education Grant</b> to teach local officials the value of floodplain restoration.   |
| 6  | Watershed     | LandStudies; Andy Zemba and Bill Kcenich, PA DEP; and Martie Hetherington, Schuylkill Conservation District | Investigate potential of <b>nutrient trading</b> to offset costs of floodplain restoration, other watershed & Low Impact Development (LID) Best Management Practices. Investigate Lycoming County as guide.   |
| 7  | Watershed     | Frank Snyder, DCNR Bureau of Forestry   | Plant a <b>grove of pines</b> in a Pine Grove park.   |
| 8  | Watershed     | Heath Machamer, Engineer, Pine Grove Borough  | Apply for the " <b>Green Town Initiative</b> " grant.   |
| 9  | Watershed     | Wayne Lehman, Schuylkill Conservation District  | Employ a VISTA volunteer to <b>research grant opportunities</b> for watershed projects that remain not yet funded.  |
| 10 | Watershed     | Susan Smith, Schuylkill County Planning and Zoning  | Invite LandStudies to present information on <b>floodplain restoration</b> to local floodplain ordinance administrators.  |
| 11 | Watershed     | Wayne Lehman, Schuylkill Conservation District  | Hold a half-day or 1-day <b>grant-writing workshop</b> tailored to watershed groups, conservation districts, and local officials on how to get grants for watershed and stream projects.  |
| 12 | Watershed     | Brian Uplinger, Superintendent, Pine Grove Area School District   | Consult with PA Dept of Education about introducing <b>stream function</b> into middle and high school <b>science curriculum</b> . Follow through with DEP Bureau of Watershed Management.  |
| 13 | Business      | Frank Barone, Representative Tobash, Heath Machamer   | Obtain <b>engineering records/design standards for bridges</b> in Pine Grove Borough that detail original elevation of streambed below bridges for comparison to DEP permitted dredge depths.   |
| 14 | Business      | Pine Grove Business Association and Pine Grove Borough officials  | Encourage Schuylkill County and its municipalities to revisit <b>Act 167</b> (Stormwater Management).   |
| 15 | Business      | Susan Smith, Schuylkill County Planning and Zoning  | Inventory the status of stormwater management ordinances and/or Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance ( <b>SALDO</b> ) <b>regulations for compliance with Act 167</b> within the municipalities in the Upper Swatara watershed.  |
| 16 | Business      | Borough Councils, Township Supervisors, School District, DCED, and Legislators.                             | Explore <b>Pine Grove Borough/Pine Grove Township consolidation</b> .   |
| 17 | Business      | SEDCO   | Investigate <b>reuse of industrial properties</b> including floodproofing options for structures vacated by Manorwood and Pine Grove Homes.   |
| 18 | Business      | All business owners   | FEMA has a program on preparedness (what to do before, during, and after a flood). More info can be accessed at <a href="http://www.ready.gov/business">www.ready.gov/business</a> .  |
| 19 | Student/Teen  |   | Investigate holding <b>Teen Night Dances</b> .  |

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#### COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

##### ***Situation:***

Luzerne County comprises 890 square miles in the northeastern Pennsylvania “Coal Region” area and is considered to be part of a larger Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area.

The targeted support is focused on the north and middle parts of the Wyoming Valley that was heavily impacted by flooding. The area is flat at the Susquehanna River Basin and rises from an elevation of 700 feet up to 2,000 feet in some places. Bear Creek, on the eastern side of the valley, has a mean elevation of about 2,000 feet, while Pittston, located on the Susquehanna Basin, is at about 700 feet. The Valley extends as far north as Exeter Township with Plymouth Township on the west, Bear Creek Township on the east and Hanover Township in the south. The County is crossed by a series of east-to-west oriented mountains that mostly drain into the Susquehanna River, with the Lehigh River draining some eastern and southeastern portions and forming part of the southeast County boundary.

From September 6 to September 8, 2011, Tropical Storm Lee as much as 10 inches of rain fell in parts of Luzerne County. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, September 8, the Susquehanna rose by an average of more than 10 inches every hour, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

By 6 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7, Luzerne County had ordered the evacuation of 50,000 people not protected by the Wyoming Valley Levee. The following day, areas protected by the levee that were affected by Agnes were evacuated. In all, more than 100,000 people were evacuated. The evacuation order was lifted the afternoon of Saturday, September 10.

The Susquehanna River crested at 42.66 feet, as measured at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Gauging Station at Wilkes-Barre at 3 a.m. Friday, September 9, breaking the previous record of 40.91 feet, set during the 1972 Agnes flood. The NWS had reported the river crested at 9:45 p.m. on Thursday at 38.83 feet; however, the river continued to rise. Once the river had crested, it dropped rapidly, reaching a water level of about 28 feet by 8 p.m. on Saturday, and 16.88 feet on Monday.

A fifteen mile, three-part Wyoming Valley Levee System in Plymouth, Kingston-Exeter, and Wilkes-Barre/Hanover Township provided some protection to certain communities, but caused increased flooding to other municipalities such as lower Duryea, Pittston, West Pittston, Plains, Harding, Plymouth, Bloomsburg, and Shickshinny. West Pittston and Plymouth Township were the most proportionately affected, with over 300 homes with serious damage in West Pittston, and nearly all of West Nanticoke in Plymouth Township seeing very deep flooding. Other jurisdictions such as Exeter, Plains,

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Plymouth Borough, Duryea and Jenkins Township suffered serious flooding in pockets along the river.

Initial LTCR assessments identified communities within the Wyoming Valley that potentially needed assistance and the County and State have since requested recovery planning assistance for the Valley. Flood control has been a long standing effort in the Wyoming Valley and some regional planning has been ongoing. Specifically, a Lackawanna County and Luzerne County *Comprehensive Plan, Long-Range Transportation Plan* and *Hazard Mitigation Plan* have been formulated and are in various stages of adoption. A regional cooperative approach for this area that suffers from repetitive flooding is being encouraged. Therefore, targeted support is being provided for the townships of Conyngham, Jenkins, Plains, and Plymouth and for the boroughs of Duryea and West Pittston.

### **Conyngham Township**

The 16.8 square mile Conyngham Township is located on the Susquehanna River in the southwest portion of Luzerne County. The Township is governed by a Board of Supervisors. Mocanaqua, which is on the Susquehanna just across from Shickshinny, is one of the primary developed centers within Conyngham Township and was the area hardest hit by flood damage.

Little Wapwallopen Creek is one of the sources of flooding in Conyngham, along with the Susquehanna River. During flood events, water from Little Wapwallopen Creek backs up as it enters the Susquehanna, flooding a substantial area.

The flood damaged 128 homes in Conyngham Township. The area between River Street and Italy Street in Mocanaqua sustained the most serious flood damage. Of the damaged homes, 20 have been submitted for FEMA HGMP acquisition. Approximately 40 homes have been abandoned. No businesses were affected.

### **Jenkins Township**

Jenkins Township is located north of Plains Township on the southeast side of the Susquehanna River, encompassing a land area of approximately 16 square miles. The Township is governed by a Board of Supervisors. Jenkins Township contains several unincorporated villages including Port Griffith and Inkerman.

The Susquehanna River is the principal source of flooding in Jenkins. Flood damage in Jenkins Township was concentrated along River Road and in Port Blanchard. Both businesses and residential properties in this area reported damage. The 8th Street Bridge was closed during the flood, reopening the afternoon of Monday, September 12, 2011. Preliminary estimates indicated that 70 homes had flooding on first floor or higher resulting in \$1.75 million in damage, five homes had basement flooding causing \$50,000 in damage, 20 trailers sustained \$600,000 in damage, and eight businesses sustained \$3.725 million in damages.

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According to local officials, there are locales within Jenkins Township on higher land that may be potential relocation sites for businesses and homeowners and some flood victims may relocate with the assistance of Hazard Mitigation grants for acquisition/buyout.

### **Plains Township**

Plains Township covers 13 square miles northeast of Wilkes-Barre with the Susquehanna River forming the northwest township boundary. A five-member Board of Commissioners governs Plains Township.

The Susquehanna River is the principal source of flooding in Plains. Mill Creek is another source of flooding. Damage in Plains Township was concentrated and the areas impacted are small compared to the much larger township; however, the affected areas sustained severe damage. Homes and businesses along River Street at Wilson's Corner and the Plainsville Flats sustained the majority of damage with flood depths of 43 feet in some places. Estimates indicate that 63 homes and 50 businesses were damaged. According to local officials, there are locations within Plains Township on higher land that may be potential relocation sites for businesses and homeowners.

### **Plymouth Township**

Plymouth Township is on the north bank of the Susquehanna River, across the river from the City of Nanticoke and west of the Borough of Plymouth and the City of Wilkes-Barre. It is 7.5 square miles. The unincorporated population center of West Nanticoke is located within the Township on the Susquehanna across from Nanticoke. A Mayor and a three-member Board of Commissioners governs Plymouth Township. The Township has no professional planning or economic development staff.

The Township now operates under a Home-Rule charter and is currently an Act 47 distressed community. Plymouth Township Supervisor Chairwoman Gale Conrad said "Since the Township was designated Act 47 by the State in 2004 and raised the earned income tax, roads are being paved, infrastructure is being repaired and the budget is balanced. Our credit is now restored, which was something so, so, so poor to lose," The home rule charter change was voted in on Nov. 8, 2011. The changes to Plymouth Township's government will be minimal with the City changing from a commission to a strong-mayor form of government. Also, the charter keeps the three-member Board of Supervisors, but eliminates the three elected auditors required by second-class township code. Instead, the charter calls for Township officials to continue hiring professional accountants to do the annual audits, as has been done since the Township went Act 47, Conrad said. Also the municipality can raise real estate taxes by as much as 210 percent as an alternate way to raise income. Home-rule charters have to be in place five years before they can be changed through referendum.

Township-wide, a small proportion of housing had major damage however, within West Nanticoke, there was more major damage. Roughly one third of the housing stock in

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West Nanticoke was affected and many small businesses along Highway 11 through West Nanticoke reported damage.

### **Duryea Borough**

Duryea Borough is located about ten miles northeast of Wilkes-Barre and two miles north of Pittston at the junction of the Lackawanna and Susquehanna rivers. It is 6.5 square miles and has a Mayor and Council government.

The Lackawanna and Susquehanna rivers are the primary sources of flooding in Duryea. Duryea is partially protected from flooding by levees on the Lackawanna River. However, there is a 1,100-foot gap in the levee. The Pennsylvania DEP's approximately \$1.8 million project to fill this gap is in the design phase, with construction tentatively scheduled to begin in summer 2013. In the September 2011 flood, seepage under and through the existing dike system contributed to flooding.

More than 1,000 people were evacuated when the levee on Chittenden Street was breached. The flood affected 339 homes in the borough, 237 of which had severe water damage with water depths up to eight feet, and a Roman Catholic elementary school. The municipal building and other community facilities were not affected. Five businesses were affected but have since returned. The September 2011 flood forced some residents to leave and negatively affected the Borough's tax base.

### **West Pittston Borough**

The Borough of West Pittston has a land area of 0.95 square miles, and is bounded on the east by the Susquehanna River across from the City of Pittston. It is north of Jenkins Township and south of the Borough of Duryea. West Pittston has a Mayor and Council form of government with an appointed Borough Manager, but no professional planning or economic development staff.

Approximately one fourth of the borough's land area was affected by floodwaters. Residential property damage was significant. Businesses were also damaged. The Borough has no land to expand.

The Borough estimates that 880 of the community's 2,377 housing units were affected. The flood caused first floor damage to 236 homes, with 16 receiving second floor damage. Basement flooding was reported in 628 structures. More than 50 residences reported structural damage. The flood damaged 26 businesses, few of which have returned. In addition to building damage, approximately 10 miles of road were damaged. The library was damaged, but was restored after nearly six months.

### ***Guiding Principles:***

After meeting with Shickshinny Borough leadership on October 25, 2011, LTCR, PEMA and Luzerne County Emergency Management leadership, Luzerne County Emergency Management independently suggested that a regional effort to aide recovery in the Wyoming Valley was needed, verifying FEMA assessments regarding area communities.

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An initial meeting was held on December 6, 2011 and six targeted communities, the boroughs of Duryea and West Pittston and the townships of Conyngham, Jenkins, Plains and Plymouth were invited. Representatives from Conyngham Township, Duryea Borough, Plains Township, Jenkins Township, NEPA-Alliance, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), FEMA, and Luzerne County attended this meeting and agreed that cooperation would assist them in addressing many of the long-term issues caused by repetitive flood loss.

The group agreed to work together to develop a long-term recovery plan that fosters cooperation and addresses the following issues:

- Repetitive loss- Improving the management structure to better prepare for and absorb flood events
- Population- Maintain and grow population in the face of acquisition
- Economic Impact- Ensuring the prosperity of the small business community

Given the existing capacity for local and regional planning within the County, LTRC assistance was to be limited to consultation services and hosting specific meetings and workshops. This will allow the Wyoming Valley region to benefit from a more strategic view in conjunction with other communities in the area with similar recovery challenges. Tools for identifying key priorities, strategies, projects and potential resources to facilitate long term recovery will be provided. State and/or federal interagency partners will be brought in as a part of a focused workshop or consultation with the communities to help promote sustainable, resilient initiatives, and provide information regarding available resources to assist with implementation.

The LTRC process will also encourage communities to practice values-based planning and smart growth principles as the communities formulate their recovery strategy. Values-based planning seeks broad community input so that land use planning protects community assets, may make it easier to adapt to change and ultimately enhances their unique sense of place. Smart growth utilizes creative strategies to develop in ways that preserve natural lands and critical environmental areas, protect water and air quality, and reuse already-developed land.

#### **Values-Based Planning Principles**

- Engage broader, more diverse and representative community members.
- Catalyze community and personal discussions that harness the power of comments to identify fundamental values, build civic spirit and generate social capital across political, economic, racial and other history or emerging divides.
- Connect the citizens' conversations to place.
- Devise a consensus-based course for change and future growth that reflects shared values and enhances both the places and communities in which people live, work, and play.

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- Engender a culture where land-use decisions are made only after consideration of their effects on both important community attributes and economic concerns.
- Ensure that a community's unique attributes are protected and supported through policy, ordinances and public investment.
- Devise ways for local leaders to steward this work and hold themselves accountable through monitoring of decisions, actions and results.

Efforts under ESF #14 Long Term Community Recovery (LTCR) are driven by State/local priorities, focusing on the restoration of infrastructure, housing, and the local economy. In this instance, ESF # 14 involvement was limited in scope to technical assistance, given the existing capacity for local and regional planning within the County. The LTCR technical support provided through ESF #14 is supplemental to traditional FEMA Public and Individual Assistance financial assistance programs and operations. Specifically LTCR assistance was limited to a series of workshops to teach the LTCR recovery planning process and consultation services to the five individual municipalities involved, with Plymouth Township choosing not to participate. This allowed the Wyoming Valley region to benefit from a helpful training and dialogue with other communities in the area with similar recovery challenges.

A detailed management plan for this operation was developed by ESF #14 LTCR for use by FEMA to direct/manage the scope, schedule, staffing, and timeline for assistance and to communicate these management elements to the State Lead for LTCR. The management plan was consistent with the recommended support and concurred on by the FCO and state LTCR lead.

At the initial Wyoming Valley Steering Committee meeting on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the scope of work and proposed timeline were shared with the participating communities to ensure clarity of commitment for technical support and to manage expectations for delivery of the support.

Tools for identifying key priorities, strategies, projects and potential resources to facilitate long term recovery were provided. The LTCR process encouraged the communities to practice values-based planning and smart growth principles as the communities formulate their recovery strategy. Values-based planning seeks broad community input so that land use planning protects community assets, may make it easier to adapt to change and ultimately enhances their unique sense of place. Some state and federal interagency partners were brought in to present their organizational programs to help promote sustainable, resilient initiatives, and provide information regarding available resources to assist with project implementation. Upon the completion of the report in May 2012, a gathering of more partners will allow the group to make additional contacts.

LTCR technical assistance offered by FEMA to Pennsylvania communities was undertaken in coordination with the Department of Community and Economic

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ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA

Development (DCED) and the Governor's Center for Local Government Services (GCLGS). Representatives attended on... DCED operates the Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) that provides support for capacity building, sustainable development, consolidation of service delivery, economic development, land use planning, and floodplain management.

### LTCR INTEGRATION WITH WYOMING VALLEY

On December 6, 2011 the initial Wyoming Valley Steering Committee meeting was held. Representatives from Conyngham Township, Duryea Borough, Plains Township, and Jenkins Township met with NEPA-Alliance, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), FEMA, and Luzerne County representatives. It was agreed that cooperation would assist them in addressing many of the long-term issues caused by repetitive flood loss. It was explained that a regional approach to dealing with common issues allows for the sharing of information and the potential to leverage resources. Even local projects representing the interests of a specific community or communities, that can show some input and support from multiple stakeholders and communities, are much stronger and have a better chance at attracting funding than a community project that has not been honed by lessons learned or helpful feedback.

Through outreach efforts, participation in the Steering Committee meetings expanded to include representation from community members, West Pittston Borough, Project Keystone, FEMA Mitigation, FEMA Inter-Governmental Affairs (IGA), FEMA Volunteer Agency Liaison (VAL), PA Governor's Office, and PA Dept. of Commerce & Economic Development (DCED).

In addition to sharing the tools that the participants can use to help with recovery now and to build a framework and partnerships so that recovery will be faster in the future, the LTCR team also actively pursued possible resources and partners that would benefit the Wyoming Valley recovery process. Guest presenters at the Steering Committee included Tom Healy of the Wilkes-Barre Small Business Development Center (SBDC), who spoke about his organization and the services it provides, Cindy Campbell of DCED, Bob Pitcavage of PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Dennis De Mara of PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Karen Mann, the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison. They each shared information regarding the grants and programs provided through their organizations. In addition, Tom Pellegrini and Steve Zaricki of the NEPA-Alliance gave a presentation outlining Economic Disaster Administration (EDA) Disaster Relief funding opportunities.

## Section v.) Wyoming Valley Area Transition Report

ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA

### TIMELINE

December 6, 2011

- Long-Term Recovery introductory meeting.

January 5, 2012

- Initial Wyoming Valley Steering Committee meeting.

January 5, 2012

- Initial Conyngham Township Working Group meeting.

January 5, 2012

- Initial Plains Township Working Group meeting.

January 5, 2012

- Initial West Pittston Borough Working Group meeting.

January 13, 2012

- Initial Duryea Borough Working Group meeting.

January 13, 2012

- Initial Jenkins Township Working Group meeting.

January 19, 2012

- Steering Committee mapping exercise.
- Steering Committee vision exercise.

January 31, 2012

- NDRF Rollout in Harrisburg attended by Wyoming Valley community officials and residents.

February 2, 2012

- Wyoming Valley Mission Statement defined.

*"Wyoming Valley is a safe, family-oriented, vibrant community that is culturally diverse but united and prospering with progressive economic opportunities and cultural activities, making it a highly desirable community for all to live, work and play."*

February 21, 2012

- Duryea Borough Vision meeting.

March 5, 2012

- West Pittston Borough Vision meeting.

March 29, 2012

- Wyoming Valley Steering Committee was transformed into "Valley United".
- Valley United vision statement defined.

*"Unified valley communities working towards public safety and revitalization."*

- Valley United training process completed.

April 16, 2012

- West Pittston Design Workshop.

May 31, 2012

## Section v.) Wyoming Valley Area Transition Report

ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA

- West Pittston Project Fair  
June 7, 2012
- Wyoming Valley report presentation.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Built capacity through the creation and implementation of a recovery steering committee.
- Developed a partnership with Bloomsburg University to provide support to Wyoming Valley communities through their internship program.
- Coordinated with FEMA Inter-Governmental Affairs to introduce local State Representatives and Senators to the Wyoming Valley LTCR process.
- Initial individual working group meetings were attended by over 45 residents and local officials.
- Created a database of leadership programs and private foundations that could be beneficial partners to the Wyoming Valley communities.
- Encouraged and supported 14 local community members who attended the National Disaster Recovery Framework rollout in Harrisburg, PA.
- Partnered with Project Keystone throughout the planning process.
- Identified partnership opportunities between the Wyoming Valley communities and American Rivers, a non-profit organization that focuses on protecting and restoring rivers and streams.
- Introduced Wyoming Valley communities to the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AVP). AVP provided guidance on resources for fundraising opportunities.
- Introduced the Wyoming Valley Steering Committee to the Wilkes University Small Business Development Center (SBDC). SBDC offers no-cost services to assist business start-ups and expansion.
- Provided facilitator training to over 25 community members and Project Keystone staff.
- Facilitated a West Pittston Vision Meeting which had an attendance of over 250 people and local media coverage.
- Coordinated with PA Department of Community and Economic Development, PA Department of Environmental Protection, and FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison to provide information grants and programs available to the Wyoming Valley communities.
- Assisted in preparing a West Pittston all-hands meeting that was attended by 108 community members and representatives from Senator Toomey, Congressman Barletta and the Governor's Office.
- Provided information on Braddock, PA, a suburb of Pittsburgh that has undergone a dramatic recovery from economic hardship and community blight.

## **Section v.) Wyoming Valley Area Transition Report**

### **ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA**

- Assisted in preparing the West Pittston Tomorrow Open House that was attended by 150 community members and the local media. The community presented their identified issues, goals, and potential solutions to recovery issues.
- Coordinated with NEPA-Alliance to provide EDA funding and low-interest business loan information.
- Conducted a capacity-building Project Development Workshop.
- Partnered with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to conduct a capacity building training workshop for steering committee members and meeting facilitators.
- Facilitated 65 steering committee and working group meetings.
- Developed and prioritized 7 recovery and community interest projects.
- Generated Word Clouds from Steering Committee and West Pittston Vision Meetings.
- Developed a comprehensive resource guide listing potential grant programs available to the communities.

## **LTCR TEAM'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Wyoming Valley Steering Committee (Valley United)**

- Organizational meetings (biweekly)
- Organizational capacity assistance
- Assist in the procurement of FEMA Emergency Management Program Grants
- Assist with recovery/NRDF continuity planning
- Develop, schedule, publicize and conduct Capacity Building Workshop
  - Grant Writing
- Report production/delivery
  - Organizing the event (date, location)
  - Inviting and securing attendance
  - Preparation of supporting materials/copies
  - Identifying presenters (local, state, federal)
  - Media outreach

### **Conyngham Township**

- Biweekly committee meeting support
- Project development guidance
- Partnership guidance

### **Duryea Borough**

- Project development guidance
- Partnership guidance

## **Section v.) Wyoming Valley Area Transition Report**

ESF #14 Technical Assistance Team DR-4030-PA

### **Jenkins Township**

- Biweekly committee meeting support
- Project development guidance
- Partnership guidance

### **Plains Township**

- Biweekly committee meeting support
- Project development guidance
- Partnership guidance

### **Plymouth Township**

- No support requested

### **West Pittston Borough**

- Public meeting mission support
- Weekly committee meeting support
- Project development guidance
- Partnership guidance
- A Project Development workshop to serve as an educational and capacity building tool for the Steering Committee.
- Access to a community planner to identify potential designs for community plans.
- A Decision Making workshop to serve as an educational and capacity building tool for the Steering Committee
- A Community Recovery Plan that addresses individual municipal issues through a values-based planning approach and includes potential resources and implementation strategies
- A DVD containing supporting materials from the planning process including documentation of all meetings, project development guides, and maps
- A comprehensive resource guide listing potential grant programs available to the community

Sync Meeting Tracking Sheet  
4273-WV-DR

| Synch Meeting | Action Item   | Who              | Next Action/Status  | Date Completed |
|---------------|---|------------------|---|----------------|
| 10/12/2016    | Activation of a Sustainability Advisor  | FDRC             | Execute Mission Assignment with EPA   | 10/20/2016     |
| 10/12/2016    | Discuss with DHS Office of University Programs (OUP) options for engaging academia through Coastal Resilience Center of Excellence            | FDRC             | Call DHS OUP & Gavin Smith from Coastal Resilience Center                                     | 10/20/2016     |
| 10/12/2016    | Coordinate call between WV CRO and EPA Rural Advantage programs   | FDRC & CRO       | Held call and disseminated info (webinar) to interested applicants                            | 10/18/2016     |
| 10/12/2016    | Determine if there are opportunities for funding (e.g. Dept of Labor) the Mined Miners re-training program                                    | FDRC             | Economic RSF including in the RSS; Call placed to Eastern Kentucky group with similar program |                |
| 10/12/2016    | Coordinate call between WV CRO and National Renewable Energy Lab to discuss hydro and other renewable energy options within the impacted area | FDRC & CRO       | Call held on 10/21  | 10/21/2016     |
| 10/12/2016    | Initiate contact with USDA/National Forest Service regarding opportunities related to the Mononghela National Forest.                         | FDRC             | Contacted USDA  |                |
| 10/19/2016    | Update direct technical assistance approach to reflect CRO & SDRO input   | FDRC, CRO & SDRO | Revise based on input from CRO & SDRO   |                |
|               |   |                  |   |                |
|               |   |                  |   |                |
|               |   |                  |   |                |
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|               |   |                  |   |                |
|               |   |                  |   |                |

**1. Comprehensive Planning for the Next Flood** (Christy DeMuth, AICP Planner, WVU Land Use Law Clinic)

A comprehensive plan is the foundation for future growth in a community. WVU Law is currently compiling a list of all comprehensive plans in WV and identifying gaps. In recent years, WVU has completed 25-30 comprehensive plans for communities that lacked the capacity to draft plans for themselves.

A comprehensive plan determines a communities' visions and aspirations; it directs investments (a road map for the future). Public input on the plan is essential. A comprehensive plan is required if a community wants to enforce land ordinances.

Land use and identifying the flood zones are mandatory components of the comprehensive plan. Communities must 1. identify the floodplains 2. recognize emergency shelter demand, locations and capacity 3. Emphasize public safety and infrastructure concerns. Comprehensive plans must discuss natural hazards.

Example Comprehensive Plan excerpts:

-Wellsburg, WV – Issue: flooding is a major concern. Implementation: ensure flood maps are up to date, educate citizens regarding hazards of flooding and costs associated with flooding.

-Alderson, WV – Issue: the greenbrier river floods very often, lack of communication in community. Implementation: develop a plan on how to communicate better with community using social media, txt alerts, etc.

-Greenbrier County, WV – Adopted in 2014. The plan entails creating a new marketing plan by the CVB, revitalizing flood impacted areas and addressing infrastructure concerns.

**2. Regulatory Approaches to Floodplain Management** (Chet Parsons, AICP, AECOM, Inc. \*\*\* Jesse Richardson, Lead Land Use Attorney, WVU Land Use Law Clinic)

The Floodplain ordinance is a combination of zoning ordinances, Subdivision and Land Development ordinances (SALDO), and building code. A community **MUST** have a floodplain ordinance in place if they want to employ FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

A legal argument **CAN** be made that a county cannot enforce their floodplain ordinance without a comprehensive plan. Therefore, it is **IMPERATIVE** that comprehensive plans be drafted by all communities throughout WV.

Zoning ordinances protect property rights, promote economic growth and protect public welfare, health and safety.

SALDOs are mostly focused on infrastructure, utilities (roads, waste, wastewater, storm water and drainage.) Landscaping can minimize flood damage.

Building Codes address what materials you can construct with and set the standards that buildings must comply with. Banks are increasingly requiring that structure be built to code. Otherwise, they will not lend money.

A current buzzword is smart growth. Basically, we don't want to go back to where we were before the flood, we must have additional resiliency. Smart Growth is accomplished through a shared community vision, forward thinking, resilient design, an assessment of the housing stock and using your floodplain as a guide to direct development to areas that aren't prone to floods.

Examples of Smart Growth:

- Kentlands, Maryland – Live/work units, variety of housing types (retail bottom floor, apartments above)
- Wellington, Colorado – discounted homes for county employees in Breckenridge, CO.
- Cuyohga County, Ohio – low interest home improvement loan program
- Lowell, Massachusetts – adaptive reuse of historic buildings

The average 100-year floodplain is projected to widen 45% by the year 2100. How do we combat this? Through green infrastructure. Rain gardens can help reduce runoff. Permeable pavements can allow standing water to return to the water table (Huntington using this already in some areas). Land conservation/parks can allow for more green space to soak up rain water. These initiatives are implemented through SALDO mostly.

A big issue brought up by Kanawha county floodplain manager Chuck Grishaber: there are regulations on public, state owned bridges. No regulations on private bridges. Many of the culverts on private bridges are far too narrow – especially bridges over small creeks that the Army Core of Engineers aren't concerned with. This cause a big problem during the flood because many of these bridges washed out and clogged areas, causing additional flooding. This regulatory issue needs to be addressed by the state.

**3. Post-Disaster Floodplain Management** (Darlene Messina, Floodplain Management Specialist, FEMA Region III; Betsy Ranson, Floodplain Management and Insurance Specialist, FEMA Region III \*\*\* Kevin Sneed, CFM, WV State NFIP Coordinator)

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was established in 1968. Participation in the NFIP is voluntary, however, participating in it makes you eligible for flood insurance. Benefits of the NFIP: grants and loans, disaster assistance, federally backed mortgages. The goals of the NFIP include offering low cost insurance and encouraging a comprehensive approach to floodplain management.

NFIP Roles:

Federal: risk identification, provide insurance coverage, establish dev., building standards.

State: provide technical assistance to local communities, evaluate and document floodplain management activities, identify violations

Local: adopt and enforce a floodplain ordinance, issue and deny development, inspect active construction sites (development oversight is a local responsibility)

The minimum federal requirements of the NFIP include: requiring permits in special flood hazard areas, ensuring development is reasonably safe from flooding, constructing developments with flood resistant materials, elevation of developments located within the floodplain, limit development in floodway. ("development" is defined by the NFIP as any man-made change to improved or unimproved real estate, including but not limited to buildings, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations)

NFIP participating municipalities must agree to adopt and enforce an ordinance that meets these minimum requirements. In an NFIP community ANYONE ANYWHERE can buy flood insurance. Everyone in the community should purchase flood insurance. 30% of flood insurance claims are households that were outside the floodplain entirely. Many flood insurance policy holders are unaware they have ICC (Increase Cost of Compliance). ICC can be used to elevate home, demolish house, move the house, flood proof house.

What is the Community Rating System? It is a voluntary, incentive based program for NFIP participating communities. It recognizes communities with good practices that exceed the minimum requirements set forth by the NFIP and rewards those communities with flood insurance discounts.

Hazard mitigation grants can perform the following eligible activities: acquisition, demolition, relocation.

Things for communities to remember for the next flood event: when the event happens, you must do damage assessments IMMEDIATELY. It's a good idea for communities to have AT LEAST two flood plain managers. As you're working with people to rebuild, fix homes, encourage them to invest in the maximum amount of mitigation. This will pay off in the long run.

**4. Common Issues with Development and Building in the Flood Plain** (Jared Anderson, AICP, Attorney, Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic \*\*\* Charlie Baker, CFM, Chair of the WV Floodplain Management Association, Hampshire County \*\*\* Ashley Carr, Certified Code Enforcement Officer, City of Summersville)

FEMA designates the special flood hazard area (SFHA) as an area that has a 1% chance of annual flooding. This is different from the floodway, which is much more dangerous. Less development is allowed within the floodway.

A communities' floodplain ordinance needs to be updated regularly, must be easily accessible, needs to explain the criteria for building development and plan approval. FEMA strongly discourages variances to the floodplain ordinance (this creates "he did this so I can too" scenarios)

A permit is required for all development in the SFHA. Flood resistant construction is required, as well. Make sure citizens know and clearly understand the permitting process and its requirements. The permitting fee is determined by the local government. The decision on an application should be made in a reasonable amount of time.

Special Considerations: building code acknowledges unique historic structures (must be on national register or state approved historic register). Substantial damage and substantial improvement requirements for flood design is not applicable with historic structures. Provided modifications do not preclude the structures continued designation as a historic structure.

Special Considerations: Mobile homes require permanent reinforced foundations. Must be anchored to resist flotation. Mobile homes are different from RVs. RVs must be ready for highway use and cannot be on a site for more than 180 consecutive days.

#### **5. Redevelopment in the Floodplain** (Katherine Garvey, Director, Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic)

Communities should create small, targeted redevelopment plans rather than city-wide redevelopment plans. Communities can marry their redevelopment plans with the comprehensive plan (should be consistent with one another). Floodplain management can help you prioritize redevelopment areas.

The contents of a redevelopment plan include but isn't limited to: area description, area map, area objectives, land use plan, statement of need for facilities and utilities, zoning issues and requirements, implementation (action steps, potential partners, financing).

The main difference between a comprehensive plan and the redevelopment plan is the scope. Comprehensive plan = macro look; Redevelopment Plan = micro look. The Comprehensive plan is broader, maps out every parcel in the community. A redevelopment plan is more targeted towards specific neighborhoods. The Redevelopment plan can be characterized as the implementation piece of the broader comprehensive plan.

#### **6. Non-Regulatory Approaches for Effective Floodplain Management** (Jared Anderson, AICP, Attorney, Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic \*\*\* Mr. Chris Fletcher, AICP, President WV Chapter of the American Planning Assoc., Morgantown)

Safe Growth Audits are a technique to evaluate whether a community is growing safely relative to the natural hazards it faces (the safe growth audit can be found in the FEMA mitigation handbook). The safe growth audit can help prevent future conflicts, guide growth away from high risk areas, locate critical facilities (schools, hospitals, daycares, senior centers) outside high-risk zones, retrofit buildings and facilities at risk in redevelopment areas, develop knowledgeable and committed community leaders and networks and monitor and update safe growth plans.

Safe growth is community specific and depends on the hazards and vulnerabilities of each community. Resilient communities bend when in a crisis, they do not break.

Capital Improvement is major, non-recurring physical expenditures such as land, buildings, public infrastructure and equipment.

The Capital Improvement Plan is a fiscal management tool used to coordinate capital improvement projects. The CIP should include projects that strengthen at risk facilities identified in the safe growth audit. The CIP should limit expenditures on project that would encourage development in areas vulnerable to disaster.

Hazard Mitigation Plans: local governments have the responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of their citizens. Hazard Mitigation Plans reduces the risk of harm to existing and future development. The Hazard mitigation process has 8 steps: 1. Determine planning area and resources 2. Build the planning team 3. Create and outreach strategy that generates meaningful community participation and conversation 4. Review community capabilities, understand capacity issues 5. Identify risks 6. Develop the mitigation plan 7. Follow the plan 8. Updated plan as needed

**7. Players in Community and Economic Development, Post-Flood** (Michelle Diamond, FEMA Region III CPCB Coordinator \*\*\* Tracey Rowan, U.S. Economic Development Administration \*\*\* Jeff Wood, Director of Development and Intergovernmental Relations, WVNG)

Michelle and Tracey discussed the Recovery Support Functions and the Recovery Support Strategy. Jeff talked about the initiatives currently underway with the National Guard.

**8. Tying it All Together/Next Steps/Q&A** (Jesse Richardson, Lead Land Use Attorney, WVU Land Use Law Clinic)

The words that came up over and over throughout the day's conversation were: education, safety, resiliency, cooperation.

There was an emphasis on bridging the gap between federal, state and local governments. I think the Office of Economic Resiliency will be able to accomplish just that.

The attendees felt the state needs to have better coordination with regards to donations. There needs to be more conversation between the state and non-profit groups. (VOAD ISSUE)

A good suggestion I heard yesterday was creating an MOU among planning departments so that well-off departments can better help departments that lack capacity in the event of a disaster.



FEMA

**NDRF:  
STRENGTHENING  
DISASTER  
RECOVERY FOR  
THE NATION**

This bi-weekly newsletter is intended to help coordinate communication among local, state and federal representatives and other stakeholders about the progress of recovery planning and the goals of recovery support.

We welcome your feedback. Email  
sarah.magee@  
fema.dhs.gov

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# WV Recovery Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

OCT. 14, 2016

## *A Message from Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, Kevin Snyder*

The tragic flooding events of June had wide-ranging impacts for communities across the 18 impacted counties – impacts that were both immediate and longer-term in nature. While the state of West Virginia and its federal partners have dedicated themselves to addressing the immediate needs of disaster survivors, we also are working together to address longer term, community wide recovery needs.

Recovery from catastrophic events such as the June floods – where the impacts are devastating to many essential community elements such as schools, roads, business districts – is a complex process. West Virginia communities have shown great resilience in the face of this disaster, but the impacts of this event have presented some monumental recovery challenges that require the support of the whole community. These challenges are often magnified because key stakeholders – whether government entities, officials, businesses, or individuals – seldom have recent experience with recovering from catastrophic events.

The NDRF presents a model for how the federal government can bring its resources to the table to help state and local partners through this complex process. To this end, FEMA has been working with federal, state and local partners to collect and analyze a wealth of information about the effects of the disaster and the state's recovery needs and resources. Collecting and analyzing this information allows us to develop strategies that will enhance state and local recovery efforts. Developing recovery strategies is what we are currently focused on. At the federal level we organize these strategies into the Recovery Support Strategy (RSS). The RSS outlines how federal departments and agencies will coordinate and contribute to state and local recovery efforts. The process of developing the RSS helps to sort out, identify, harmonize and sequence a wide-range of recovery support activities and resources that will enhance recovery. Recovery can be a long and complicated process, but the initial steps we are taking in partnership with the state will lay a strong foundation for a more resilient West Virginia. Over the coming months we will use this newsletter to inform you – our key stakeholders – of the activities we have underway, where we are headed, and the progress we are making. Thank you for taking the time to read the newsletter and stay engaged in the recovery process.

## National Disaster Recovery Framework

FEMA's National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) brings expertise in coordinating federal and other resources to support long-term state and community disaster recovery. It provides context for how the whole community works together to restore, redevelop, and revitalize itself following a major disaster or any other disruptive emergency. Its flexible structure enables recovery managers to operate in a unified and collaborative manner. It focuses on the best ways to restore, redevelop and revitalize the health, social, economic, natural and environmental fabric of the community and build a more resilient nation.

The NDRF is one of five components in the suite of National Planning Frameworks. Each covers one mission area: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.

The NDRF defines:

- Core recovery principles
- Roles and responsibilities of recovery coordinators and other stakeholders
- A coordinating structure that facilitates communication and collaboration among all stakeholders
- Guidance for pre- and post-disaster recovery planning
- The process by which communities can capitalize on opportunities to rebuild stronger, smarter and safer.

These elements can be employed to expedite recovery of disaster-impacted individuals, families, businesses and communities. Equally important, they can also build long term community capacity to better manage the next major disruptive incident.



*Flood survivor repairs his home*

***There is a very wide range of capabilities and resources that federal agencies, departments, and collaborative partners can bring to the table in support of recovery efforts in a post-disaster incident environment.***



*The disaster destroyed or severely damaged hundreds of homes such as this one*

## NDRF's West Virginia Activities

On June 25, the president signed a major disaster declaration for the state of West Virginia. As amended, the declaration came to designate 12 counties for FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA) programs, six additional counties for PA only and Mitigation statewide for damages as a result of severe storms, flooding, mudslides and landslides that occurred June 22-29, 2016. To assess whether long term recovery assistance from FEMA was feasible, an Advance Evaluation Team (AET) was deployed. In mid-July it recommended activation of three Recovery Support Functions (RSFs): Community Planning/Capacity Building (CPCB), Economic and Housing. RSFs

work to facilitate problem solving, improve access to resources and foster coordination among stakeholders and the federal, state, local, private and voluntary agencies that provide recovery assistance.

Gov. Tomblin appointed Adjutant General James A. Hoyer as Chief Recovery Officer and Keith Burdette as the State Disaster Recovery Officer.

Subsequently, the RSFs completed their Mission Scoping Assessment to identify major issues for West Virginia's long-term recovery from this disaster. Those issues are outlined in the articles below and on page 3.

## Community Planning & Capacity Building Issues

The Community Planning and Capacity Building Recovery Support Function, also known as CPCB RSF, strives to restore and strengthen state, territorial, tribal, and local governments' ability to plan for recovery, engage the community in the recovery planning process and build capacity for plan implementation.

Recovery planning in the post-disaster environment builds short and long term community resilience, empowers local leaders and stakeholders, and improves recovery outcomes at the individual and community-wide level.

As the result of the Mission Scoping

Assessment CPCB identified three sector-specific recovery issues for West Virginia:

### ***Local Recovery Capacity Exceeded***

- Limited staffing, capabilities or capacity
- Limited access to resources
- Continued susceptibility to flooding

### ***State Recovery Capacity Strained***

- Limited institutional knowledge and staffing
- Need for broader recovery coordination

### ***Recovery Planning Challenges***

- Lack of pre- and post-disaster recovery planning
- Lack of comprehensive planning.

## Economic Issues



Temporary ATMs in Clendenin

The Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration is the coordinating agency for the Economic RSF. The Economic RSF integrates the expertise of the federal government to help local, state, and tribal governments and the private sector, sustain and/or rebuild businesses and employment, and develop economic opportunities that result in sustainable and economically resilient communities after large-scale and catastrophic incidents.

The Economic RSF has identified several issues that are beyond the state's capacity to handle on its own. The issues identified are:

- *Pre-existing economic conditions exacerbated by the flood*
- *Impact to business and capital needs*
- *Business recovery and preparedness*
- *Impact to infrastructure*
- *Impact to tourism and regional brands*
- *Agricultural losses*

## Housing Issues



Destroyed home in Greenbrier County

Adequate, affordable, accessible, habitable, resilient housing makes a difference for the whole community. It is a pre-and post-disaster issue in some West Virginia communities. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the coordinating agency for West Virginia housing recovery with support from other federal agencies. FEMA's Housing RSF Field Coordinator, state and federal recovery support partners, regional banking organizations, the West Virginia Governor's Office, the West Virginia National Guard, other departments at the state and local level and voluntary and other non-governmental agencies are collaborating on planning, policy and resources to meet housing development needs in the impacted communities.

The Housing RSF has identified the following Issues:

- *Financial Burden of Homeownership*
- *Habitable and Environmentally Healthy Housing*
- *Prevalence of Blight in Communities*
- *Including Resilience in Rebuilding*

## Long-Term Recovery Groups

Because both focus on long-term recovery, there can be confusion between Long-term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) and the Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) which coordinates the efforts of all stakeholders for long-term recovery and resilience.

Organized on a county-by-county basis, long-term recovery committees are composed primarily of community volunteers, with support from charities, voluntary agencies and faith-based organizations. Their mission is to work one-on-one with individuals and households to meet unmet disaster-recovery needs.

The LTRCs have been formed in the 12 counties designated by their agency for assistance to individuals and households. Their work involves assessing and addressing needs such as healthcare and human services, repairing and rebuilding of survivors' damaged homes and offering financial assistance.

## What is Resilience?

Resilience can be defined in a number of ways. In essence, it is being prepared to recover rapidly from disruptions due to emergencies. Disasters are a crisis but they are also an opportunity to develop more resilience.

States and communities may develop their own local definitions of resilience. For example, the Colorado Resilience Working Group defines resilience as “the ability of communities to rebound and positively adapt to or thrive amidst changing conditions or challenges—including disasters and changes in climate—and maintain quality of life, healthy growth, economic vitality, durable systems and conservation of resources for present and future generations.”

Resilient communities are the foundation of a resilient America. As West Virginia recovers from the recent disaster, there will be many opportunities to improve resilience.

As West Virginia recovers from the recent disaster, there will be many opportunities to develop more resilience.

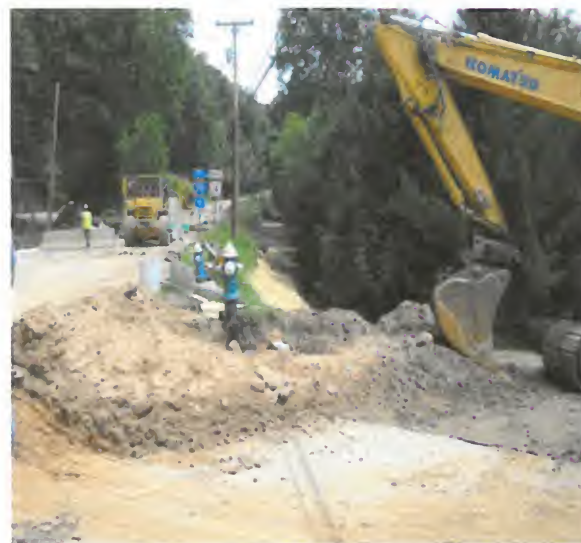


## Recovery Planning Success Story: Planning for Long-Term Resilience in Vermont

Flooding from storms affects many communities across the country, causing billions of dollars of damage annually.

Climate change projections suggest that storms will likely become more frequent and stronger in many regions of the country. In light of these trends, many communities want to improve disaster recovery and long-term flood resilience planning. “Flood resilience” means taking measures to reduce communities’ vulnerability to flooding and support long-term recovery after a flood.

Communities throughout Vermont faced this reality when Tropical Storm Irene hit in 2011, devastating infrastructure, communities, and lives. In 2012, in the wake of Irene, the state of Vermont requested Smart Growth Implementation Assistance from EPA and FEMA. Smart Growth is an urban planning and transportation theory that concentrates growth in compact walkable urban centers to avoid sprawl. The assistance focused on incorporating smart growth principles into state policies, local development regulations, and Hazard Mitigation Plans to increase community flood resilience.



*Beginning to rebuild Clendenin, WV*

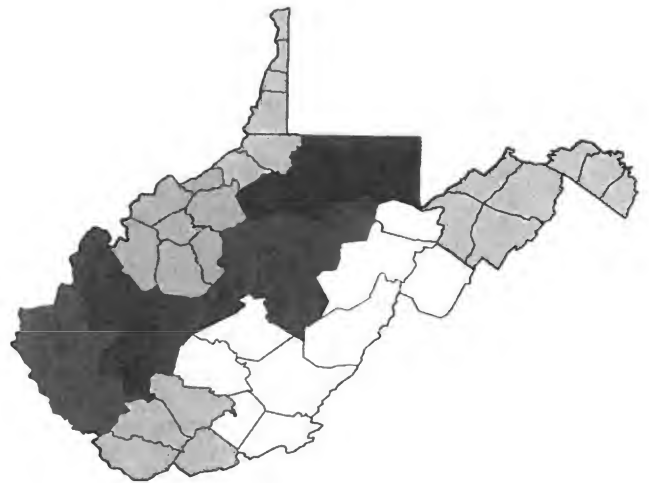
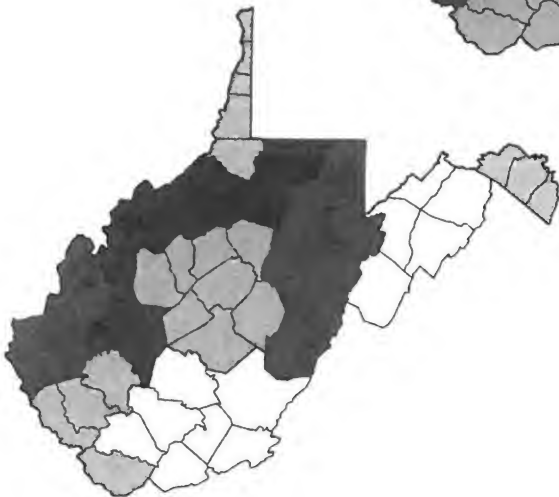
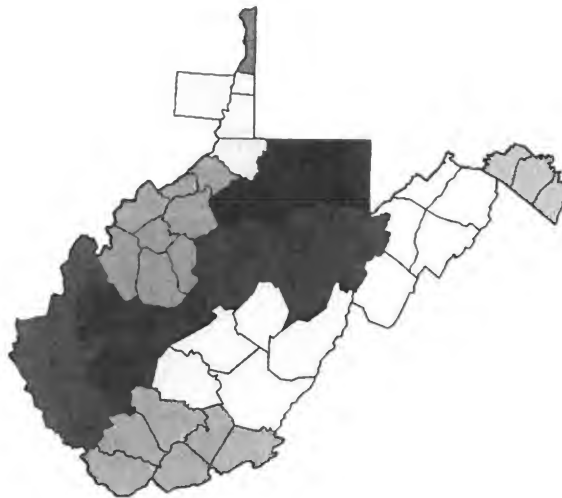
Learn More at:

[http://floodready.vermont.gov/sites/floodready/files/documents/Flood\\_Resilience\\_Checklist\\_151210\\_FORM\\_distributed.pdf](http://floodready.vermont.gov/sites/floodready/files/documents/Flood_Resilience_Checklist_151210_FORM_distributed.pdf)

This link, “Vermont’s Flood Resilience Checklist” can help communities determine if their policies will prepare them for floods.

# A Roadmap on Maximizing Local Government Effectiveness in West Virginia

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## Foreword

The attached report, “A Roadmap on Maximizing Local Government Effectiveness in West Virginia,” is the work of a group at West Virginia University who recognizes that, both statewide and nationally, many committed and passionate leaders are grappling with how to best deliver valuable government services.

Government helps society meet our most critical needs, from safety to education. However, despite changes in those very needs, as well as in demographics, technology, budgets and transportation, we rarely have time to stop and take stock of whether we are getting the most out of our governmental structures and delivery systems.

At WVU, we recently took a moment to listen and learn. We have a number of researchers who have long studied some of the issues most critical to our state at this moment. Those faculty volunteered their time to join together and consider the complex questions related to government efficiencies. As communities across the state explore how to best align government services, functions, and arrangements to meet changing needs, we hope that the Roadmap developed by our WVU team can be a useful tool.

A roadmap shows you where you are now and the routes you might take to successfully arrive at various destinations. *This* Roadmap shows us our state’s needs and challenges, as well as routes our state may consider in the ongoing navigation toward good government. We also note a few speedbumps we may encounter along each of those routes.

West Virginia University hopes to be helpful as our state charts a path to the future. We may run into detours and roadblocks on the journey to our best West Virginia, but along the way we will also have opportunities. We are committed to working alongside all of you who care so much about West Virginia to ensure a prosperous future for our state and its people.

## Executive Summary

The economic, political, and environmental climate in West Virginia positions the state to reconsider the efficacy of local and state government. Changes in population, advances in technology, and new funding mechanisms allow for innovative problem solving in ways not previously possible. The time is ripe to reconsider the ways in which government best provides services to communities. West Virginia University is poised and positioned to move forward in an effort that is, by nature, multi-disciplinary. The following report takes an initial look at the ways in which government reorganization might better serve West Virginia's citizens.

This report is a roadmap that will help us further understand the journey ahead of us in identifying crucial issues, resources, and options for the future. The report does not provide any final recommendations; rather, it is intended to serve as foundational material for a much more in-depth examination of the many facets of enhancing local government efficiency and effectiveness over coming years and a delineation of options to achieve these goals.

In this report, we begin with an overview of major economic and demographic changes that are serving as a catalyst for reform. Virtually all available statistics point to a state that faces significant economic development and public service delivery challenges and corresponding tight public budgetary constraints. We then consider the essential functions of government in serving citizens and their communities. We also discuss a set of key thematic questions as we consider the effectiveness of current arrangements and set the stage for further discussion.

Finally, we move to an examination of the regional governmental and administrative units that are currently in place in West Virginia.<sup>1</sup> We briefly survey 19 such units, noting the function and origin of each one. We also consider the way in which these units divide West Virginia into various jurisdictions, and we pay attention to whether the regional divisions tend to be consistent. Our general examination indicates that these divisions are typically inconsistent. We suggest that additional research should investigate whether moving to a more consistent structure would be helpful.

West Virginia county lines were drawn centuries in the past. As we move deeper into a new era of budget strain and economic diversification, it would be remiss to accept the status quo without reevaluation. Other states are similarly grappling with the question of efficacy of government organization. Thus, we seek to pose questions and foster the conversation about regionalism and government efficiency.

Government reorganization may not always provide the most effective course of action. Thus, we seek objective, research-based analysis rather than emotional responses. In any case, this effort will be driven by the citizens of West Virginia. To succeed, this effort must originate in the grass roots, and we must listen respectfully to all of the viewpoints, learn what the concerns and options are, then lead the way forward.

Moving forward, we must be cognizant that needs differ from region to region. Government reorganization in West Virginia should echo best practices, considering the successes and shortcomings of consolidation efforts outside the state. Data analysis and applied research should be the cornerstones



of these efforts, and we hope that citizens will consider the overall welfare of the state, as well as their individual interests. We are first committed to listening and learning, for then we are better able to lead.

If changes can improve conditions at the state level, then local improvements necessarily follow. West Virginians will need to work together to discuss, assess, and act on important choices that we face in meeting both challenges and opportunities.

# 1 Introduction

West Virginia is well positioned to consider innovations in the delivery of essential public services, the effective use of resources to build human capital and physical infrastructure, and the improvement of strategies to encourage and sustain economic development. Dramatic change is currently underway in our state. Recent events, including the recent economic recession, the ongoing budget crisis, and the need to respond to natural disasters, have brought these changes into focus. These transitions are made further evident by long-run demographic changes, such as population loss, population migration, and an aging population. Within this multidimensional context, the state's strained fiscal position encourages bold thinking about the best mechanisms for providing governance at the local and regional levels.

This brief paper provides a roadmap of essential questions to consider in assessing and reviewing current local government structures and their role in providing effective and accountable services to the citizens of West Virginia. In doing so, we offer some ideas and observations for a more sustained and rigorous discussion about governmental modernization. These ideas consider economies of scale in the delivery of essential services, strategic coordination in addressing economic and community development challenges and opportunities, and optimal ways of ensuring public accountability through sound fiscal stewardship and respect for local autonomy.

While discussions of reorganization and coordination of governmental services are often framed in terms of political consolidation of local governmental jurisdictions (e.g. city-county mergers, annexation, or county consolidation), we stress that the starting point for discussion rests in identifying crucial functional responsibilities expected of government at the local and regional levels in the 21st century. With these essentials identified, we can begin the process of considering how more integrated and coordinated processes may enhance our state's ability to meet these expectations. In doing so, we identify a number of policy tools—such as functional consolidation of services at the local level—that can be used to achieve these ends. We also identify some of the methods of putting these tools into place, such as the use of existing statutory provisions.

In developing this paper, we are mindful that West Virginia has been innovative in the past in addressing the challenges of modernizing government to meet the needs of change. We think of the transfer of many highway and welfare services from the counties to the state in the 1930s. We also think of the 1960s, when modernization efforts concentrated on creating more accountable and coordinated budgeting processes. In the 1990s, Governor Caperton led an effort to reorganize much of state government to provide more effective delivery of health and human services at the local level.

In order to dig deeper into policy choices and options we present an overview of a larger number of considerations relating to the reorganization of cities within counties, as well as to the restructuring of counties themselves. This list is far from complete and only serves as a general framework for developing a more mature understanding of the issues over a longer-run research agenda. We have identified several key questions to propel this conversation forward:

- What are the major economic and demographic factors that require bold thinking about government reorganization and coordination at the regional and local level?
- How can reorganization and coordination solve problems and capitalize on opportunities?
- What policy tools do we have at our disposal, and what new ones might be developed?



- How do we honor local identity and ensure that citizens have a voice in local affairs while making appropriate adjustments in the size and scale of regional and local governance systems?
- What efforts are already underway to coordinate and consolidate efforts at the regional level? What role have businesses, government, non-profits and citizens played in these efforts?
- Finally, what is the best way of organizing a deeper understanding of our options for improving the delivery of government services and programs for West Virginia's citizens and their communities?

As a roadmap for future exploration, this report is intended to serve as a foundation for a much more in-depth examination of the many facets of enhancing local government effectiveness over coming years and a delineation of options to achieve that goal.

## 2 Catalysts for Change: The Troubled West Virginia Economy and Demographic Change

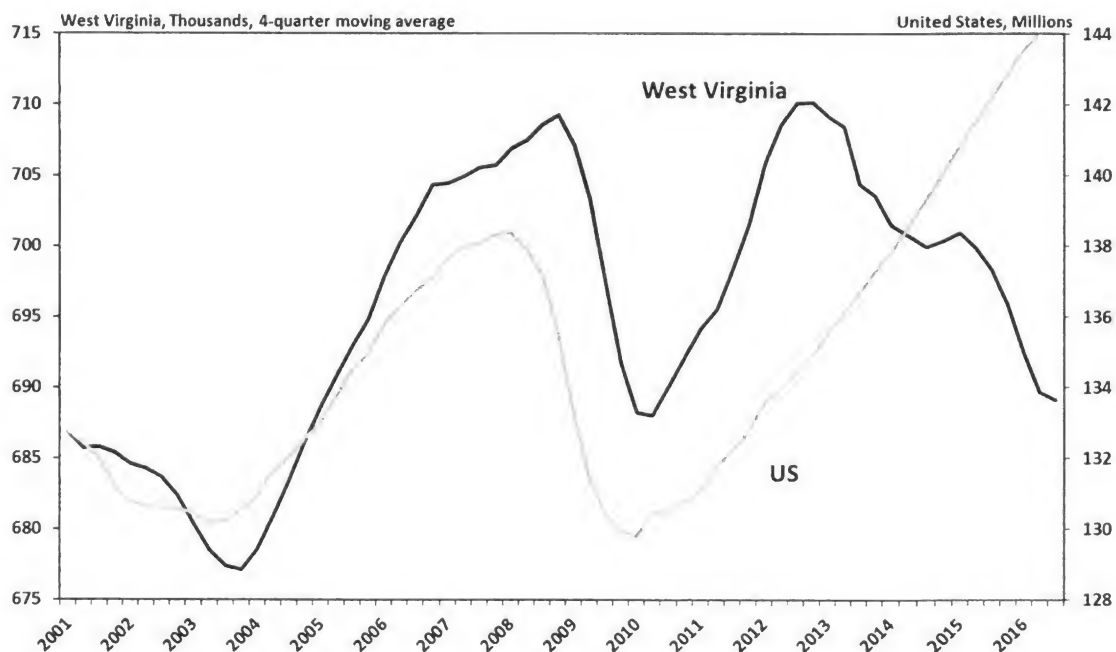
West Virginia has experienced a severe economic downturn in recent years and currently faces daunting challenges in terms of developing the state's economy over the long run. Corresponding to this economic turmoil, both state and local governments face persistent budgetary challenges, while demands for public services remain high. As such, it is imperative that policymakers and thought leaders in the state investigate ways to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government within West Virginia.

In this section, we provide a brief discussion of the economic climate in West Virginia. This helps to provide context for the challenges faced by all levels of government in West Virginia.

**EMPLOYMENT:** In Figure 1, we report total employment in West Virginia and in the nation for comparison purposes. As illustrated, the state has suffered significant job loss in recent years, losing more than 22,000 jobs overall since early 2012, a time of relatively steady employment growth nationally. Correspondingly, unemployment in also much higher in the state compared to the nation.

We expect job growth over the coming five years to average around 0.6 percent per year, which is noticeably less than expected job growth at the national level. With this rate of job growth, it will take West Virginia more than five years to return to the level of employment observed in early 2012.

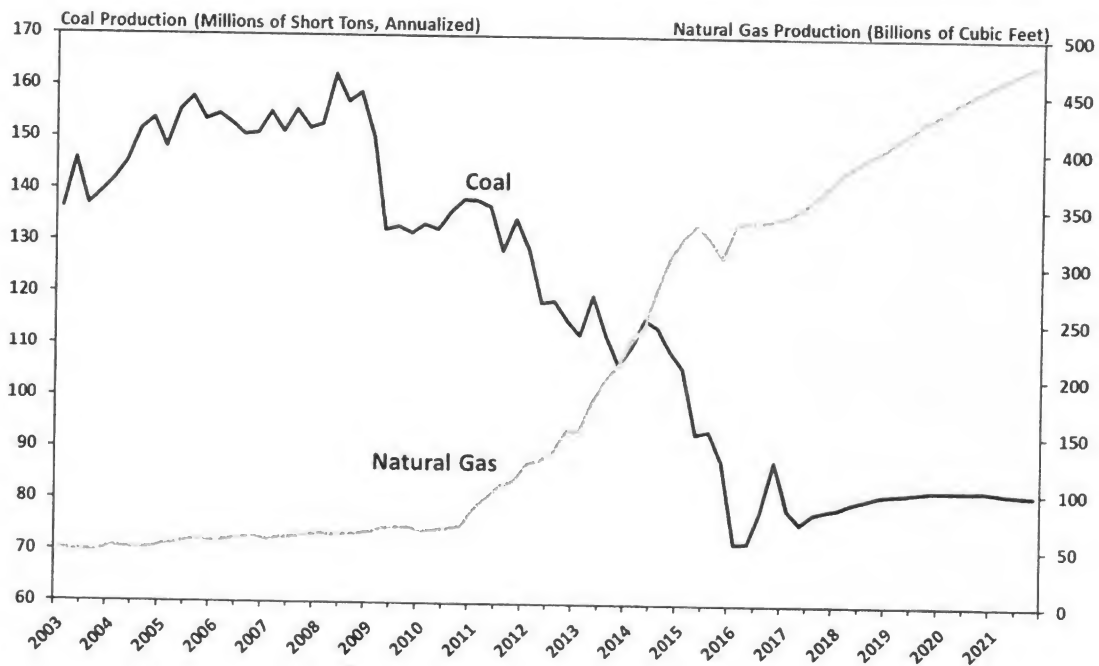
**Figure 1: Total Employment**



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

**ENERGY:** Employment loss in West Virginia has been driven in large part by losses in the state's coal industry. As illustrated in Figure 2, coal production in West Virginia fell by around 50 percent between 2008 through 2016, due to a confluence of national and international factors.<sup>2</sup> Direct coal employment losses account for around three-fourths of the total employment loss in the state over this time period. Coal production is expected to stabilize in the near term but is not expected to rebound to a substantial degree.

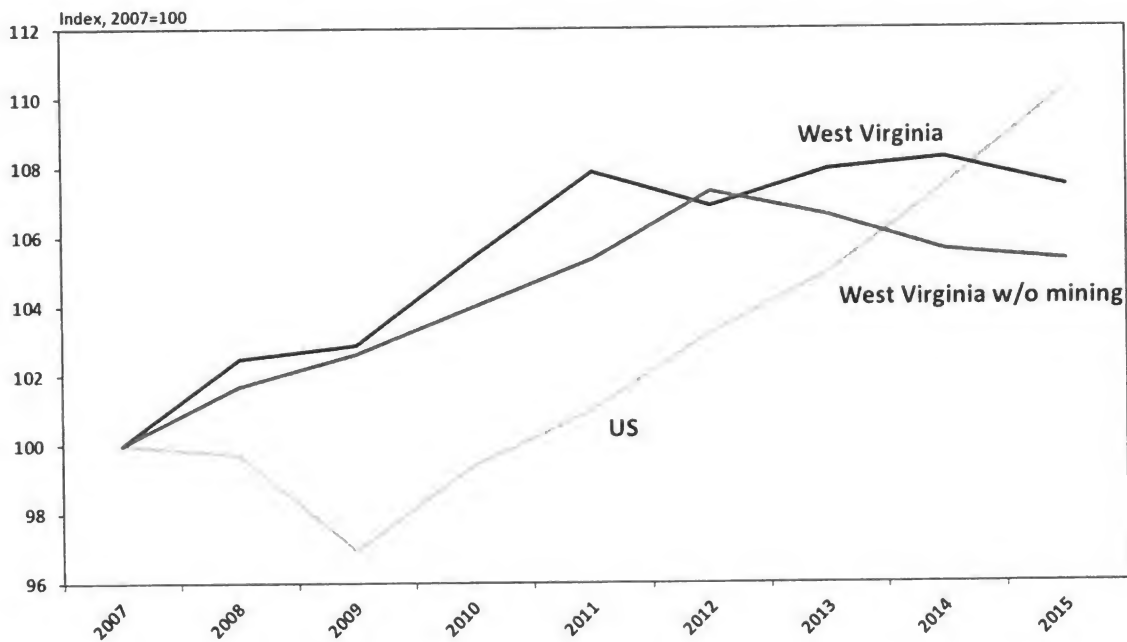
**Figure 2: West Virginia Coal and Natural Gas Output**



Source: US Energy Information Administration; WVU BBER Econometric Model

**GDP:** In Figure 3, we report Real GDP growth for West Virginia. As illustrated, total economic output in the state, after accounting for inflation, has largely been flat since 2012, although, from a strict perspective, there have been two years of recession during the period. When considering economic output for all industrial super sectors, except energy (green line in the Figure), 2015 output stood roughly at 2011 levels. Overall, this indicates a broad stagnation in the state's economy, within energy and more broadly.

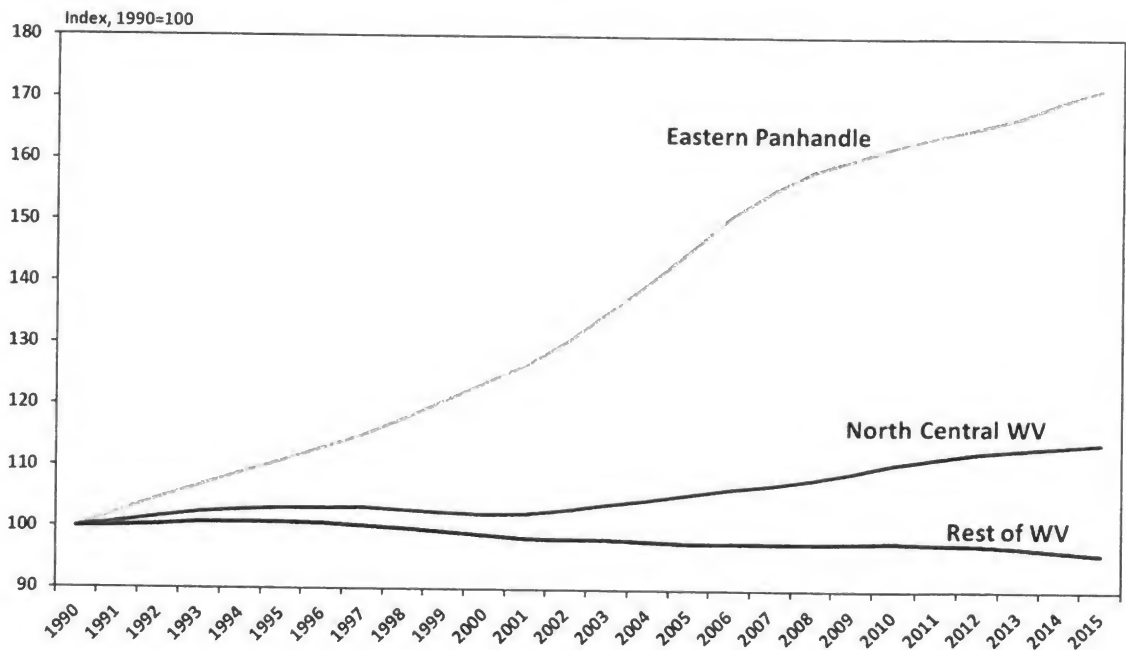
**Figure 3: Real GDP Growth**



Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis

**POPULATION:** In Figure 4, we report population growth in three West Virginia regions. As shown, population grew rapidly in the Eastern Panhandle—consisting of Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan counties—between 1990 and 2015, rising more than 70 percent. North-Central West Virginia—consisting of Monongalia, Preston, Marion, and Harrison counties—also grew, though more slowly than the eastern region. North-Central grew more than 10 percent over the same time period. However, population in the rest of the state declined by about 5 percent.

**Figure 4: West Virginia Population Growth**



Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis